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Human rights situations that require the Council's attention

Written statement* submitted by the Organization for Defending Victims of Violence, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[24 May 2018]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

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Weapons and the Saudi Arabia

Wars and armed conflicts cause destructive consequences in the lives of ordinary people. Civilians are the first victims of war who suffer displacement, lack of access to basic services, and destruction of urban infrastructures. In these circumstances, children are the defenceless victims of wars, wars that take away their families and violate their right to life and the right to education.

Saudi Arabia and its Arab coalition attacked the most impoverished country of the Middle East, Yemen, to start a huge human, economic and environmental catastrophe in the country.1 The repercussions of this war which is one of the most catastrophic wars in the recent decades, target civilians more than soldiers. According to UN figures, to-date, more than 10,000 civilians in Yemen have been killed by Saudi airstrikes alone. According to UNHCR, up to the end of 2016, more than 2.4 million Yemenis were displaced.2 Famine and hunger have affected millions of children in the country.3 And diseases such as cholera has taken the lives of hundreds of thousands of children.

According to a UNICEF assessment, nearly half a million children have dropped out of school since the 2015, with the escalation of conflict in Yemen, bringing the total number of out-of-school children to 2 million. Meanwhile, almost three quarters of public school teachers have not been paid their salaries for over a year, putting the education of an additional 4.5 million children at grave risk.4

Various international human rights organizations have confirmed Saudi's humanitarian crimes in Yemen. Amnesty International has documented repeated indiscriminate attacks and other serious violations by the Saudi Arabia-led coalition in Yemen that have killed and injured civilians, including children. Still, countries including the United States of America, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and France continue to make lucrative arms deals with the Saudis and other coalition members. 5

According to figures over the last three years the British government has done over 4.6 billion pounds in arms trade with Saudi Arabia.6

In 2014, Saudi Arabia and Canada signed an arms deal valued at $14.8-billion. This contract to provide the Saudis with weaponized armoured vehicles is still going ahead, even though there is ample damning evidence that Saudi Arabia violates the human rights of its own citizens and has committed serious violations of the laws of war in Yemen, which has caused widespread death and displacement7.
Between 2008 and 2015, developing countries were the top arms purchasers globally, with Saudi Arabia and India taking the lead (Theohary 2016, Summary). In 2015, Canada was the second biggest arms exporter to the Middle East, after the United States.8

Data from 2016 arms sales showed 270 armoured combat vehicles were exported from France to Saudi Arabia—more than all other exports of this type combined. Similarly, of 708 guns and rifles exported by the country in 2016, 500 were precision rifles sold to the Saudis.9

1 http://nationalinterest.org/feature/saudi-arabias-war-yemen-has-been-disaster-25064
2 http://www.unhcr.org/en-us-protection/operations/4c907a4a9/yemen-fact-sheet.html
3 https://www.unicef.org/yemen
4 https://www.unicef.org/yemen/
5 https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2018/01/saudi-arabias-biggest-obstacle-to-progress-lies-in-its-systematic-human-rights-violations/
6 https://www.unicef.org/yemen
https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/saudi-war-crimes-yemen-british-weapons-bae-systems-know-agm-values-a8347736.html
7 http://ploughshares.ca/pl_publications/arms-and-forced-displacement-canada-saudi-arabia-arms-deal/
8 http://ploughshares.ca/pl_publications/arms-and-forced-displacement-canada-saudi-arabia-arms-deal/
9 http://www.euronews.com/2017/11/30/which-eu-countries-sell-arms-to-saudi-arabia-

These figures are just a tiny part of the multi-billion dollar arms trade of some countries with Saudi Arabia and its allies. According to the reports of several international organizations, Saudi Arabia has committed war crimes in Yemen, and the world today has completely forgotten this issue.10

In today's interconnected world, the responsibility of international peace and security alongside protection of human rights is the duty of all members of the international community, and this factor clashes with the continuation of the lethal arms trade and military machinery sales to warmongering countries. As a nongovernmental organization and defender of human rights and humanitarian law, we call upon the members of the international community to remain committed to their international commitments towards preservation of peace and defence of human dignity.

Alongside most members of the international community, we believe that the arms trade partners of Saudi Arabia in supplying arms to this country are also responsible in the war crimes committed against the defenceless people of Yemen. Therefore, we invite all countries to stop their arms trade with countries that are waging war against Yemen, to stop their participation in the human catastrophe that is taking place in Yemen, and help to dowse the flames of war and airstrikes against the defenceless people.

10 http://www.amnesty.org/en/news/2015/09/yemen-the-forgotten-war/